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THE INFLUENCES AT WORK ON THE OLD MENNONITE CHURCH WHICH CAUSED THE VARIOUS GROUPS OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH TO COME INTO EXISTENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The Missionary Church has experienced a variety of mergers and schisms in its history. With each experience the denomination seems to have launched forward with renewed vigor and determination. This work cannot fully expose the type of people who make up the Missionary Church, but it should indicate a people determined to be all that God intended them to be.

From its beginning to today, The Missionary Church has been comprised of people who were willing to face the worst opposition if doing so were God's will. This can be seen in the issues they fought for and the principles they upheld. It can also be seen in their missionary zeal and evangelistic endeavors.

It has been a humbling experience writing about this denomination. This writer has a profound respect for the origins and leadership of this church which far exceeds previous feelings or thoughts on the matter. May this research show the importance of the Missionary Church contribution to the kingdom of God and the Church Universal.

Chapter One

The History of the Missionary Church

Several groups during the past one and one quarter century joined together to form the denomination now known as the Missionary Church. The characteristics of the church blossomed with the union of each group. The contributions from each group were good for the church. The greatest changes came during the turbulent beginning years in its formative history.

The New Mennonites:

In September, 1849, Rev. Daniel Hoch and Rev. Dilman Moyer were disowned by the Old Mennonite Church during its Conference in Kitchener, Ontario. These two men had been ministers with a vision for the spiritual renewal of their denomination. "Hoch stressed that members should have a definite Christian experience and urged the holding of prayer meetings."[1]

What Hoch and Dillman were calling for was not entirely new to the Mennonite community. Nearly seventy years prior to this Martin Boehm and Philip Otterbein had preached the same message in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania to the Mennonites there. Boehm and Otterbein's ministry touched members of several German denominations,

> ...awakened persons of Mennonites, Lutherans, German Reformed, Brethren or Treufer, "whose hearts were closely joined together - had a common interest, not only in regard to the general cause of religion, but in each other's individual edification," and they met in the capacity of a social devout band, from house to house, to make prayer and supplication for the continued influence of God's Spirit.[2]

Martin Boehm, an Old Mennonite minister, received the same response from the Mennonite leadership as Hoch did and was excommunicated in 1775. Had Hoch and Boehm lived in today's church, neither would have been ostracized for their exuberance in promoting pietism and church renewal.

During the mid-nineteenth century the Old Mennonite Church had settled into a stagnant and lifeless pattern of worship and change was not only unknown but actively opposed by its membership.[3] Dr. J.A. Huffman reported the spiritual life as: "at a rather low ebb; the means of spiritual growth were meagre."[4] He also stated that services were often held once or twice per month rather than weekly. It was these conditions which Hoch and Moyer attempted to change.

Hoch became affiliated with the General Conference Mennonites which was founded by John H. Oberholtzer of Pennsylvania. Several of Hoch's followers chose not to join the General Conference with him and became leaders of a new group, calling themselves the New Mennonites.

Three names which predominantly stood out in the New Mennonite Church were Abraham Raymer, John Steckley, and

Christian Troyer. These men made major contributions in guiding their members through this transition.

Abraham Raymer's spiritual experience was fairly representative of what other people in York and Waterloo Counties of Ontario were encountering. Everek Storms recorded:

> Raymer had started preaching for the (Old) Mennonites in the early 50's, but finally got to the place where he thought himself unsaved and living in darkness without the power of Christ in his life. At this time he experienced a change of heart, started out preaching in more evangelistic style, and began holding prayer meetings.[5]

After he was excommunicated from the Old Mennonites, Raymer began to preach wherever he was given opportunity. One of the men that came to know salvation through his ministry was John Steckley. Soon after his conversion, Steckley started to work together with Raymer in holding meetings and leading many to Christ throughout Ontario.[6] Christian Troyer, another ousted Old Mennonite pastor, joined them in the work.

The congregations of the New Mennonites owned very few buildings and had little organization. Most met in homes and often borrowed church buildings from other denominations. Most of their congregations had no pastors, but when one came through, the laity entreated the minister to take charge of their services. These services were filled with singing, prayer, and testimonies as the Spirit directed.[7]

Reformed Mennonites

The Reformed Mennonites originated near the cities of Port Elgin and Waterloo, Ontario, but eventually spread from Canada to Indiana. The leading figure in this denomination's history was a young minister who pastored in the Old Mennonite Church. His name was Solomon Eby.

Solomon Eby was a minister who did not necessarily conform to the Old Mennonite traditions. His church in Port Elgin, Ontario began to hold weekly worship services rather than twice per month as was customary.[8] Eby seemed more and more restless with his own spiritual condition as well as the spiritual condition in the Old Mennonite Church. Eby and several members in his congregation were convinced that the church did not measure up to the biblical standard.[9] Eileen Lageer summed up Eby's experience thus, "the more he studied the Word, the more uneasy he became. The more he preached to his people, the more his own heart trembled."[10] In 1869, Eby made a vow, "that from henceforth he would go as the Lord directed, cost what it might."[11] It appears that the vow he made to God became the turning point for both young Eby and his Port Elgin Church.

The Evangelical Association, an ecclesiastical body which closely resembled the Methodist Episcopal Church in polity and faith, was instrumental in working among German communities.[12] meetings in the city of Port Elgin shortly after Eby's vow to God. Many of his congregation attended

and were deeply moved by the services. In bearing witness to the spirit and enthusiasm of those revivals, they returned with many questions about the lack of enthusiasm in their own denomination. They quickly discovered that their minister, Solomon Eby, was asking the same questions himself.[13] In 1869, just a short time after his congregation approached him, Solomon Eby was "happily converted."[14]

Almost immediately Eby announced that prayer meetings would be held every week. Many took advantage of this new activity even though it was a practice which the Old Mennonite Church had strictly forbidden. These prayer meetings were held during the middle of the week.

Eileen Lageer records the results of the prayer meetings:

> Within a few months, revival broke out--and then there was no end of activity: home prayer meetings, evangelistic services, testimonies, joyful singing--everything that made for a deepening of spiritual life and joy in the Holy Ghost.[15]

Eventually, all but two members of the Port Elgin Church were genuinely converted and many in the surrounding community also found salvation during this revival.

Word of what was happening at the Port Elgin Church spread far and wide. Eby carried the news himself to a close friend, Christ Good. Good had left Ontario before Eby's conversion experience in 1869 to live in Indiana. Solomon Eby wanted to tell his friend about the incredible

experience he had had. In 1872, Eby left Ontario bound for Indiana. During his visit there he happened to meet "a promising, aggressive young leader in the Indiana Conference."[16] This minister's name was Daniel Brenneman.

The conditions in the Indiana Conference were not much different than those found in the Ontario Conference. In a letter by Brenneman in 1918 to C. Henry Smith, Brenneman reports that the church was experiencing both small and great differences of opinion with their presiding bishop, Jacob Wisler. Wisler seemed to be rather opinionated and staunch with little ability to arbitrate or compromise, even when disciplined by a board of bishops.[17] Change was not tolerated, whether good or bad, as it might hinder Wisler from wielding his political clout in the Yellow Creek Mennonite Church of Elkhart County, Indiana. These were the conditions which young Daniel Brenneman faced during his ministry as the "junior" (my term) minister of that congregation.

When Solomon Eby came to Indiana and shared what God was doing in his home church, Brenneman was fascinated enough to want to check it out for himself. He and another minister, John Krupp decided to investigate for themselves whether the report was true or not. They left for Port Elgin, Ontario in 1873. Brenneman wrote concerning the trip, "my earnest prayer to God was to be led to see and do as it might be pleasing in His sight."[18]

It was as if a spark had been hurled from Port Elgin, Ontario to Elkhart County, Indiana. The spark was fanned gently by the Holy Spirit until it became a revival flame. This did not happen over night.

Both men were impressed by what they had seen in Ontario. Krupp vocalized his favorable inclinations more so than Brenneman. Brenneman was more cautious and guarded in speaking all that his heart had felt concerning Port Elgin's revival. About a year after his first visit he returned to investigate and see if the fires of revival were still ignited in Eby's church. The report of Brenneman's second visit included the following:

> Arriving there among these zealous worshipers, I at once found that their former zeal had by no means abated, and that under the preaching of the Word souls were convicted and pressed through to the King at about every service. What could I say, only that this is the Lord's doing and marvelous in our eyes.[19]

Upon returning home to Indiana, Brenneman discovered that his friend John Krupp had been excommunicated from the Old Mennonite Church. The reasons for Krupp's expulsion were not given until a meeting at a later date. This meeting was attended by the Old Mennonite bishops and ministers in the area. Here Krupp was cited with favoring protracted (revival) meetings and allowing women to testify. Each of these issues were under the ban in the Old Mennonite church. After giving these reasons, the bishop then asked, "Are you all satisfied?" The men went around the table and

gave their consent until it came to Brenneman, who answered last. Daniel Brenneman replied,

> Brethren, to be honest before God, if our members do nothing worse than go together to read God's Word, to sing and pray, and thus worship God- that this should give us just reason to disown them as members of the Church, I candidly cannot see it that way.[20]

Shortly after the meeting Brenneman was also excommunicated from the Old Mennonite Church. He was said to be guilty of three charges: 1) Leaving the Church and supporting an excommunicated minister; 2) Teaching and preaching unscriptural customs (prayer meetings, revivals and permitting women to testify); and 3) Causing dissensions and working disorderly at home and abroad.[21] He was never given opportunity to address these charges or to defend himself in any way. According to his own account, Daniel Brenneman never harbored any malice toward the Old Mennonites even after his expulsion. He wrote about his feelings toward the Old Church; "I was a born Mennonite and have ever cherished for the Church a special interest for its welfare, and even after being expelled still feel a deep sympathy and due respect for the Church..."[22]

Following Brenneman's expulsion, he and the others who were expelled spent much time seeking God's will. Many of the laity also left the Old Mennonite Church because they agreed with the prayer meetings and protracted services. During this transition period, several denominations were

examined such as: the Free Methodists, the Quakers, the Dunkards, and the Evangelical Association. Each group presented a problem to Brenneman. The Free Methodists practiced infant baptism, sanctioned warfare, and did not practice foot-washing. The issue with the Quakers dealt with their view against the Sacraments. Brenneman took issue with the Dunkards in that, "the general tenor of their preaching savored more the letter than the Spirit."[23] The problem Brenneman faced with the Evangelical Association was their tolerance to warfare, infant baptism, and members being allowed to join secret societies. Since none of these larger denominations proved to be compatible, it was decided to form a union between the three smaller groups who were excommunicated in Indiana and Canada. These three groups were; Solomon Eby's group from Ontario, Daniel Brenneman's group from Indiana and John Steckley's group (New Mennonites) from Ontario. "A three-day conference was held in the Snyder Church (Bloomdale, Ont.) March 22-25, 1874, where the union was effected, the new body choosing the name, United Mennonites."[24]

The Evangelical Mennonites:

When the Mennonites migrated to the American continent many began their residency in the state of Pennsylvania. Historically, William Penn had been very friendly toward the Mennonites and had invited them to help settle the state

which now bears his name. Penn also donated considerable tracts of good farm land for the Mennonites to possess and cultivate. Eventually large concentrations of Mennonites were found throughout the Pennsylvania country side.[25]

"In spite of the changes time invariably brings, the Old Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania failed to keep pace by adopting new methods, and clung to its old traditions."[26] The revival fires were sweeping through the area in other churches and gradually began to attract the Mennonite members. Sunday schools, prayer meetings, protracted services, and even higher education were foreign to the Old Mennonites. Their services were all conducted using the German language only. The attraction toward socialization and assimilation during the period around 1850 drew many young people away from the traditions of the Church.

Like the Church in Indiana, Pennsylvania began to hear a call for change from its young clergy members. One of these progressive Mennonites was John H. Oberholtzer. Before becoming a minister, Oberholtzer had served as a school teacher. Within five years after his ordination he was excommunicated by the Church for his active ideas and progressive views. Several other ministers who shared the same views as Oberholtzer were also expelled from the Old Mennonite Church. In October 1847, these ministers met and formed their own conference.

Oberholtzer wanted to unify all like-minded Mennonites. He began to publish a paper in 1852 called the *Religioser*

Botschafter. Many splinter groups were impressed by his ideas and, "in 1860, the first General Conference of Mennonites of North America was held."[27]

Just prior to the above mentioned General Conference, there was a split in the Oberholtzer group. In Upper Milford Township, Pennsylvania, the Old Mennonite Church selected William Gehman as one of their ministers. The church had two men who alternated the preaching responsibilities from week to week. Gehman had been raised a German Lutheran, but after his conversion joined the Mennonites.

In 1853, Gehman and several other ministers who seemed to follow him as their leader, started holding private prayer meetings. These meetings were tolerated by the church leaders, including Oberholtzer. However, in three years time, the attitude toward prayer meetings changed. Oberholtzer decided that prayer meetings were unnecessary and forbade their practice in the future. In his opinion, prayer was to go on without calling a special meeting for it.[28]

Gehman and his followers did not accept this decision. They changed the practice of holding private prayer meetings and began to open them up to the public. A total of 24 persons who advocated the use of prayer meetings were expelled from the Church.

On September 24, 1858, in the house of David Musselman, the banished ministers met and wrote up the articles of

faith and practice for this new small society. There were two Elders, three deacons, and two ordinary preachers present in this meeting.[29]

Early in their formation it was decided that "in order to spread the work... all the members, preachers, and deacons should take an active interest in the missionary cause."[30] By this they were meaning home and foreign mission work. To facilitate and organize the effort, a special Missionary Society was set up.

From 1865-1875 the Evangelical Mennonite Church grew in numbers and fields. About 1875 Solomon Eby and Daniel Brenneman met for the first time with the Evangelical Mennonites. The idea of union was almost immediate between the two churches. An example of this was found in an editorial in the Gospel Banner. A letter from David Gehman which contained a copy of the Evangelical Mennonites Conference minutes was reviewed as follows:

> We are glad to notice that the subject of a more intimate connection or union with our people was taken into consideration by them at their conference. We hope like steps may be taken on the part of our people, and necessary measures be adopted at once to investigate this matter, and if possible affect a permanent union.[31]

Union did come November 6, 1879, in a special conference held at Upper Milford, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. The groups read from their respective disciplines and decided that the two corresponded together well. The only variance detected was a simple point in church government. This was not critical to either side and

with little modification the two voted unanimously to adopt the joint discipline.[32] The Evangelical Mennonites and the United Mennonites were bonded together and agreed to adopt the name, United Evangelical Mennonites.

Brethren In Christ

A group known as the River Brethren lived in the valley near the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. These people were of Swiss descent and were believed to have an indirect Mennonite background. The group called themselves the Brethren in Christ even before they officially adopted the name in 1863.[33]

Several of the Brethren in Christ moved from Pennsylvania to Ohio. From within this group a segment under the leadership of Rev. John Wenger sought to bring reforms into their church. One reform they pursued was the use of church buildings for services. Up to this time, the Brethren had held their meetings in private homes and barns and were opposed to the construction of churches.[34] Wenger's group became known as the Wengerites after they had left the River Brethren in 1828 and began holding their own services in Wenger's barn. The Wengerites again were destined to a split. This came about when "John Swank and Jacob Swank left the United Brethren and joined the Brethren in Christ, as Wenger and his followers called themselves."[35] Why the Swanks left the United Brethren was not recorded,

but John Swank moved up quickly into a prominent leadership position in this new group.. Swank shared this position with John Wenger's son, "Johnnie," even though these two leaders held differing views concerning established customs. John Wenger, Jr. (Johnnie) was more conservative than Swank and favored the Church of the Brethren practice of triune baptism and he opposed the need of a church discipline. Swank, however, placed considerable emphasis on the use of public prayer altars and protracted meetings and sought to remove the triune baptism practice. Differences caused the two groups to formally break away from each other by 1861.

The Swankites, those who followed John Swank, believed that the test of membership was "true repentance, true faith, and true conversion or regeneration."[36] The constitution they drew up in 1865 was extremely close in doctrine and belief to that of the Evangelical United Mennonites, mentioned previously.

Both Solomon Eby and Daniel Brenneman were impressed with the Swankites and desired a union between their two churches. On December 29, 1883, the two groups were united and together adopted the name Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church.

Name Change

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (M.B.C.) was considerably different from the Mennonite Church in several

areas which included matters of doctrine, mode of baptism and other significant developments over the course of time.[37] The name "Mennonite" caused the public to consider the M.B.C. Church as just one of many another Mennonite Churches.

As early as 1883 the church considered dropping the Mennonite name altogether, while forming a union with the Brethren in Christ. The main reason for leaving the name alone was given by the Canadian church. The Canadian government had allowed exemptions from military service to all groups affiliated with the Mennonites. The Canadian Church feared that changing the name might place that exemption in serious jeopardy.

The differences between the Mennonites and the M.B.C. Church widened as the years past. The whole Mennonite structure of organization was abandoned completely. Ministers had been selected by lot from within their own congregations in the Old Mennonite Church. The Mennonite Brethren Christ Church accepted men for ministry who had felt the call of God on their hearts to preach. These men were stationed to a church by the District Conference.

The Old Mennonite Church had given their pastors little or no support financially. These men would have to farm or hire themselves out to work in order to survive. The M.B.C. Church at the turn of the century began to give their pastors a regular weekly salary and attempted to give as much support as was possible.[38]

As the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church moved out into new territories, they gradually realized that many of the people they were trying to evangelize, associated themselves with the Amish, the Old Order Mennonites, the Hutterites, or the Dukhabors. This problem was especially found in the West, both in the United States and Canada.[39]

Articles in the Gospel Banner appeared in the early 1920's calling for the denomination to consider a name change. The Western districts were the most favorable toward the idea while the more populated Eastern districts were divided over the issue. Since the denomination continued to drag its feet over deciding the issue, the Canadian Northwest and Nebraska Districts requested the General Conference of 1928 to grant them the privilege of operating under the name, Missionary Brethren in Christ.[40] The Conference did not take action but this did stir up fresh dialog on the subject.

It took two more decades before the matter was finally addressed. In the 1947 General Conference at Potsdam, Ohio, after two days of discussion and prayer, the denomination's name was changed to the United Missionary Church. "The official reason was the conviction that the work of the Church could be more successfully carried on in the home and foreign fields under the newly-adopted name."[41]

Schism:

Shortly after the denomination changed its name to the United Missionary Church, the Pennsylvania District began to pull away from the group. The Pennsylvania District was primarily made up of the former Evangelical Mennonite group, founded by William Gehman.

William Gehman had lived to the ripe old age of 91. He had led the District from 1879 until he retired in 1892. While Gehman was District Superintendent, the district grew in leaps and bounds. Starting with only five churches in 1879, 26 more preaching points were added by 1900.

Upon William Gehman's retirement, the Pennsylvania District divided the State into two Districts. The leadership of one district was given to W. G. Gehman, a son of the founder. And the other district was led by H. B. Musselman, son of Jonas Musselman, one of the pioneer ministers of the district and founder of one of the first churches (Quakertown in 1872).[42]

W. G. Gehman and H. B. Musselman were recorded to be aggressive and enthusiastic like their fathers before them. They guided the District to greater membership during the first part of the twentieth century. By 1912 Pennsylvania had as many members as the Ontario and the Indiana Conferences combined. Church membership continually rose because of the wisdom shown in planting churches in populated locations rather than rural communities.

The Pennsylvania District was different from the rest of the denomination in many ways. The District had apparently discontinued the office of deacon early on because they recorded no new deacons named to their Conference after 1900.[43] This difference in practice seemed to be only a small indicator of more extensive differences.

The people of the Pennsylvania District did not assimilate into the program of the church as a whole. This was evidenced by their small support of the denomination periodical, the Gospel Banner. They eventually printed their own version of this paper calling it the Eastern Gospel Banner.

In 1947 when the denomination adopted the United Missionary Church as their name, the Pennsylvania District refused to accept the name. They continued to call themselves the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.

The most harmful of differences was found in theological doctrine. "Early in the history of the district there developed some men with Calvinistic leanings."[44] W.B. Musselman (an older brother of H.B. Musselman) was credited with the organization of several city missions and a publishing house during the early 1900's. Musselman's publishing house was called Union Gospel Press in Cleveland, Ohio. Musselman published Sunday School curriculum. This curriculum had strong Calvinistic teachings such as Timothy Smith calls "Revivalist Calvinism," where "paradoxically enough, almost Arminian on the matters of election and free

will and leaned toward new measures and interfaith fellowship."[45] This view was not not representative of the MBC church's theology. The curriculum was used by most of the churches in the Pennsylvania District. This, along with Calvinistic guest speakers in camp meetings and revivals probably promoted the gradual shift away from the Wesleyan holiness theology of the denomination.[46]

In 1952 the Pennsylvania District asked to be removed from the United Missionary Church and to be known from that point on as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania, Inc. At the time of their withdrawal they had a membership of 4,489 and 44 churches which represented close to one-third of the United Missionary Church's membership.

Missionary Church Association:

The Missionary Church Association had its roots in a branch of the Mennonites known as the Defenseless Mennonites. Defenseless Mennonites were originally part of the Amish Mennonites. "In 1866, Bishop Henry Egly, of Adams County, Indiana, led a movement based upon the necessity of personal regeneration and the re-baptism of those who had not had this experience before joining the church."[47] This new group called themselves the Defenseless Mennonite Church.

In 1890-91 there developed within the Defenseless Mennonite Church a dispute concerning modes of baptism and other doctrinal issues. Several ministers who disputed the Church's polity were expelled from the Defenseless Mennonites. These ministers became the founders of the Missionary Church Association.

Probably the most prominent of these persons was Joseph Eicher Ramseyer. The year 1869 is significant for the Missionary Church, according to historian Eileen Lageer;

> So it happened that in one year, there were born two men who were to become "fathers" of the Missionary Church. The year 1869 brought to Joseph Ramseyer physical life; to Solomon Eby, spiritual.[48]

Ramseyer was born in Zurich, Ontario, Canada. While following a plow on his grandfather's farm in 1885, he gave his heart to God and found peace of soul.[49] Soon after his conversion, the family moved to Elkton, Michigan. On their Elkton farm in July, 1891, Ramseyer had what is now referred to as the famous "willow bush experience." He described the experience in his own words;

> For three days I had given myself to prayer, and while kneeling in the willow bush, the Holy Spirit came in to abide. After singing a song, the words and music of which I had never before nor since heard, while standing in a heavenly atmosphere, I said, "What is this that has come to me?" Immediately He said within, "This is the gift of the Holy Spirit." From that moment on, I began to realize the blessing of the promise of John 16:13-15. All glory to His ever blessed name![50]

After this experience Ramseyer began to witness and preach to his neighbors in the surrounding Huron Peninsula. The

custom had been to preach in German, but this excluded most of the people in the area so he began to preach in English.

A church was erected on a corner of the family farm and Joseph Ramseyer served as pastor. Bishop Joseph Rediger of Flanagan, Illinois, and Rev. Joseph Egly of Berne, Indiana were on hand to ordain young Ramseyer in March, 1892.

The following January, Ramseyer began his evangelistic work in Ohio and continued as far west as Kansas and Nebraska. God anointed his preaching and many were converted through his ministry.

While traveling throughout the Midwest, Ramseyer began to make friends within other independent churches which shared the same beliefs and enthusiasm. Many of Ramseyer's new acquaintances later were to be influential in organizing the Missionary Church Association. One person Ramseyer met was William Egle. Ramseyer met Egle in Kansas. A close friendship developed between the two men which continued for many years.

Another person Ramseyer met on his evangelistic tours was J.A. Sprunger. Sprunger had been a business man at Berne, Indiana. While on a trip to Switzerland, Sprunger was ordained to the ministry. He proved to possess gifts which included "insight on prophetic truth and Old Testament types."[51] Throughout his ministry he founded "Light and Hope" ministries as well as several deaconess homes and hospitals throughout the Midwest.

A.E. Funk, a Pennsylvania minister in the Mennonite Church, crossed paths with Joseph Ramseyer also. On evangelistic tours, Funk traveled with Dr. A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Funk's association with Simpson soon developed a thriving and intensified ministry for Funk, especially among German speaking persons. Early on Funk's leadership abilities were recognized. In 1887 he became General Secretary of the newly organized Christian and Missionary Alliance.[52] Funk later became the first president of the Missionary Church Association in 1898.

Joseph Ramseyer met a couple who lived near Bluffton, Ohio, named Benjamin and Katherine Lugibihl. "Mrs. Lugibihl had been healed of a complication of diseases in answer to prayer."[53] This experience led them to seek for a deeper relationship with Christ. The healing also gave them the determination to get more involved in Christian service. Soon afterward, they sold their farm and bought a house in Bluffton, Ohio. This house became a "center of religious activity and a retreat for the spiritually hungry and physically sick."[54]

Later the Lugibihl family helped to organize the first school for the Missionary Church Association called Bethany Bible Institute. Joseph Ramseyer was the school's first superintendent. "This institution became the antecedent of the Fort Wayne Bible Institute."[55]

These and other great Christians surrounded Joseph Ramseyer with friendship and fellowship during his beginning years as an evangelist and minister. It was almost certain that something great was on the horizon for these like-minded Christians.

From 1891 to 1896 the Defenseless Mennonites experienced turmoil. The revival movement was in full swing in many of their churches. Evangelists preached on the baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to the new birth, the second coming of our Lord for His waiting saints, the resurrection of the just before the great tribulation, and water baptism by immersion.[56] These doctrines were contrary to the old teaching of the Mennonite faith. These evangelistic services were often filled with emotional experiences as well. This frightened the leadership of the Defenseless Mennonites. These doctrinal issues came to a head in August 1896, when J. E. Ramseyer allowed himself to be re-baptised by immersion in Lake Erie at Cleveland, Ohio. Many others who were in attendance followed his example. On December 8 of that same year, "Joseph Ramseyer was dismissed from the church as a worker and member."[57] The others who had allowed themselves to be re-baptized also were removed from church membership.

For the next couple of years Ramseyer held tent meetings in many states. Many from the Mennonite churches in the areas where Ramseyer preached came to know Christ. After they were converted, Mennonites often wanted to be

baptized by immersion. In Ramseyer's own words, " This of course barred them from church membership and the question of a new church home began to be agitated."[58] On August 29, 1898, several of the ministers and laity who were without a home church met in Berne, Indiana. There they formed the Missionary Church Association. A. E. Funk was elected president; Joseph Ramseyer, vice-president; William Egle, secretary; D. Y. Shultz, assistant secretary; and David Schindler, treasurer.

The growth and accomplishments of the Missionary Church Association were extremely blessed of the Lord. Several churches began to join the Association immediately after the denomination's formation. The first newly-constructed Missionary Church Association Church building was erected during the first year of the denomination's existence.

During the 1940's the Missionary Church Association (M.C.A.) and the United Missionary Church (U.M.C.) began to discuss a merger. By 1943 a recommendation at General Conference caused the U.M.C. to set up a committee to explore the possibility of merger. There had been several attempts to dialog on merger in the past. Some efforts dated as far back as 1900, when Joseph Egly attended the Canadian Conference held in Berlin, Ontario. According to the minutes of that meeting,

> Elder Joseph Egly of Berne, Indiana, minister of the Missionary Church, who was sent by that conference as a fraternal delegate to this conference, now addressed the conference and the

> Conference was very much pleased with his address.[59]

There had been many young people from the United Missionary Church who had attended The Missionary Association's college, Fort Wayne Bible Institute, including Kenneth E. Geiger, the first General Superintendent of the denomination. Rev. Jacob Hygema, who had served in the Nebraska Conference served on the faculty from 1920-1930 at Fort Wayne Bible Institute. These associations helped to support merger talks.

At the time of the merger dialog the main hurdle to cross for both of the denominations was not doctrinal stance. The major dilemma was the form of government employed by each group. The governmental procedures and set-up of each group were totally opposite to each other. The Association was congregational in form while the United Missionary Church operated on the episcopal plan. The Association utilized "the call" system in placing pastors, while the U.M.C. appointed pastors through the District Superintendent and a stationing committee. The districts of the M.C.A. were setup more as geographical regions under the direct leadership of the central church government. The opposite was true in the United Missionary Church whose districts exercised more autonomy and self-goverment.[60] These differences seemed insurmountable.

Through the perseverance and patience of Rev. J. A. Ringenberg, president of the M.C.A. and others, the merger talks were continued. What followed in the next several

years was nothing less than a miracle. Committees were set-up to study polity, doctrine, foreign missions, institutions, publishing and legal matters. The purpose was to prepare a constitution that would be acceptable by both groups and thus be the basis for union. The recommendations involved major changes for both churches.

At the General Conference held in Kitchner, Ontario, 1955, the U.M.C. adopted a new constitution which called for a centralized government with elected officers, and three new denominational boards were created.[61] Kenneth Geiger was elected General Superintendent.

The M.C.A. was decentralizing their government at the same time. Their districts were assuming more of the responsibility in administering their own affairs. Both denominations were preparing for merger.

In 1953 the proposed constitution was ready for ratification, but there appeared to be reservations so the vote was postponed until 1958. A two-thirds vote was required for this merger to take place. It was decided to take the United Missionary Church vote in February of 1959. When the ballots were counted the proposal for merger lost by one vote! After hearing the results of the U.M.C. vote, the M.C.A. did not ask their constituents to vote after hearing the results of the U.M.C. vote. After twenty years of merger talks, many in both churches were disappointed to say the least.

Soon the M.C.A. began to talk with the Christian and Missionary Alliance about a possible merger. These talks did not produce a mutual agreement to merge. During the 1960's, friendship rekindled between the M.C.A. and the U.M.C. and again the idea of merger was discussed.

This time the U.M.C. took greater precaution in approaching the vote. They spent much more time preparing the membership's understanding of what was being decided. One thing which helped prepare the way was that they had been using the previously agreed upon constitution for quite some time and were use to it.

On July 18, 1968 the two denominations met at the same time in different locations. The Missionary Church Association voted 91.7 percent in favor of the merger and the U.M.C. voted 96.3 percent in favor of a merger. The bond was then made official in a ceremony at Fort Wayne the very next morning. Both General Conference bodies were participants. The newly formed denomination adopted the name Missionary Church Inc.

Notes for Chapter One

[1] Everek Richard Storms, History of the United Missionary Church (Elkhart: Bethel Publishing Company, 1958), 32.

[2] F. Earnest Stoeffler, ed. Continental Pietism And Early American Christianity (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 85.

[3] Robert A Behnken, "The Distinguishing Characteristics of the Mennonite Brethren In Christ" (M.A. thes., Biblical Seminary in New York, 1945), 12.

[4] Jasper A. Huffman, History of the Menonite Brethren in Christ (New Carlisle: Bethel Publishing Company, 1920), 36.

[5] Storms, op. cit., 33.

[6] Huffman, op. cit., 40.

[7] Storms, op. cit., 24.

[8] Eileen Lageer, Merging Streams: The Story of the Missionary Church (Elkhart: Bethel Publishing Co., 1979) 17.

[9] Huffman, op. cit., 41.

[10] Lageer, op. cit., 18.

[11] Huffman, op. cit., 41.

[12] Elias B. Sanford, A Concise Cyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (Hartford: S. S. Scranton Co., 1912), 320.

[13] ibid., 42.

[14] Storms, op. cit., 36.

[15] Lageer, op. cit., 21.

[16] Huffman, op. cit., 45.

[17] Brenneman, Daniel. Letter to C. Henry Smith. Photocopy. 1918. Original letter is housed at Bluffton College Mennonite Historical Library. 2-3.

[18] ibid., 3.

[19] Huffman, op. cit., 48.

[20] Huffman, op. cit., 49.

[21] J.S. Hartzler and Daniel Kauffman, Mennonite Church History (Scottdale: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1905), 422.

[22] Brenneman, op. cit., 5.

[23] ibid., 6.

[24] Storms, op. cit., 48.

[25] Huffman, op. cit., 24-25.

[26] Storms, op. cit., 53.

[27] Huffman, op. cit., 64.

[28] ibid., 67n.

[29] ibid., 68.

[30] ibid., 70.

[31] Daniel Brenneman, ed., Gospel Banner Vol 1. No. 4 (Goshen: United Mennonites, Oct. 1978), 4.

[32] Huffman, op. cit., 72.

[33] Storms, op. cit., 57.

[34] Behnken, op. cit., 18-19.

[35] Huffman, op. cit., 84.

[36] ibid., 86.

[37] Storms, op. cit., 68.

[38] ibid., 69.

[39] ibid.

[40] ibid., 69-70.

[41] ibid., 70. (quoted from the Conference Journal: "Proceedings of the 15th General Conference," p. 50.)

[42] ibid., 71.

[43] ibid., 72. (found in 1900 and following General Conference Journals)

[44] ibid., 73.

[45] Timothy Smith, Revivalism & Social Reform (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 32.

[46] ibid., 74

[47] Jared F. Gerig and Walter H. Lugibihl, The Missionary Church Association (Berne: Economy Printing Concern, 1950), 17.

[48] Lageer, op. cit., 18.

[49] Gerig and Lugibihl, op. cit., 22.

[50] ibid., 23.

[51] Tillman Habegger, teaching notes, 1963, "History of The Missionary Church Association" manuscript, Fort Wayne Bible College, Fort Wayne, IN., 5.

[52] Gerig and Lugibihl, op. cit., 19-20.

[53] Habegger, op. cit., 4.

[54] ibid.

[55] Gerig and Lugibihl, op. cit., 22.

[56] ibid., 27.

[57] ibid.

[58] ibid., 29. (also The Missionary Worker August 1, 1939.)

[59] Lageer, op. cit., 308.

[60] ibid., 310.

[61] ibid., 311.

Chapter Two

The Influence of Prayer Meetings on the Church

The years surrounding the Missionary Church's founding were filled with spiritual awakenings and revivals throughout the North American continent. Prayer meetings became the laity's principle ministry outlet.

Historically, prayer meetings were practiced even by the Early Church. One prayer meeting was held in the home of Mary, John Mark's mother (Acts 12: 3-19). The Apostle Peter was miraculously released from prison while those participating in the prayer meeting focused their requests on his deliverance.

The Christians in Rome used the catacombs for their meetings during times of persecution. Lewis Thompson wrote, "on the testimony of Pliny, that various bodies of Christians throughout the Roman Empire were in the habit of meeting for prayer and praise."[1] The practice of prayer meetings was sporadic throughout the centuries that followed. At times, the Christian community neglected the practice, a revival reminded the church of the importance of prayer meetings. These revivals often caused spiritual renewal and God's blessing as Thompson recorded, "The seasons in which the church had spiritually prospered, were the seasons when the prayer-meeting had kindled anew the flames of devotion and revival."[2]

During the mid-nineteenth century, prayer meetings were cropping up in several places throughout North America. One of the most famous was held at the North Dutch Church on Fulton Street in New York City. Mr. J. C. Lanphier, the city missionary, organized the first prayer meeting on September 23, 1857. The meeting was designed to attract business persons to the church each Wednesday. The prayer meetings were open to all Christians who wanted to pray. The Christians attending spent their lunch time in prayer.

This Fulton Street prayer meeting grew in attendance rapidly and has been credited with sparking the great revival which swept across America and Canada during 1857-58. J. Edwin Orr reported on the effect of the prayer meetings held at Fulton Street:

> A striking characteristic of the 1857-58 Revival was that it was a revival of prayer. The most popular accounts of the 1857-58 Revival were published with such titles as "The power of Prayer," and "The Noon Prayer Meetings.[3]

The prayer meeting movement grew in leaps and bounds. Earle Cairns wrote, "In six months, 10,000 were meeting in noonday prayer meetings in New York."[4] The revival which followed encouraged many groups across the continent to begin the practice of holding prayer meetings.

As indicated in the first chapter, the Old Mennonite Church was not in favor of special prayer meetings. However, during the middle nineteenth century, prayer meetings were becoming popular in many of the larger

denominations. Prayer meetings eventually sprang up in several Old Mennonite congregations and the effects of those prayer meetings strongly influenced the founders of the Missionary Church.

The Old Mennonite Church opposed prayer meetings for several reasons. The primary opposition was that prayer meetings tended to be too emotional. One Mennonite historian wrote, "it must be recalled that the question was not a simple midweek prayer service but rather the whole range of emotional religion."[5] The Old Mennonite Church had withdrawn gradually into a more comfortable religion and prayer meetings threatened to bring change. Edwin Orr described the church as follows: "Mennonites at the mid-century lived in a liguistic, cultural and religious cocoon, scarcely influenced by society around about them."[6] Another historian, Robert Friedmann described the Old Mennonite Church in this fashion:

> It was then more or less a "sleeping church," as one minister of that time reproachfully called it. We find a good illustration of this in the following story. "At one occasion Daniel Hoch (a minister in Canada) asked an old man about the sum of our faith. He answered he could not say it, yet he has it at home in Dietrich Philip's book. Alas! How sad is it that old fathers are not able to explain their faith if they are not at home or have not fortunately the book right with them in their pocket.[7]

The emotional release which often occured at these prayer meetings became a magnet to those Mennonites who were needing such release. One prayer meeting reportedly

conducted by Daniel Brenneman was described in John F. Funk's diary entry for March 15, 1874,

> The meetings held were such prayer meetings in which much ado was made, loud crying and weeping - howling that could be heard a long distance - half a mile. Sitting or lying on the floor and making a great confusion..[8]

The emotionalism described in Funk's diary was offensive to many Mennonites of the day.

Perhaps the emotionalism which Funk had seen at this prayer meeting was more the exception to the rule rather than the common practice. Everek Storms recorded that sometimes members who were troubled about salvation opened their home for a prayer meeting and this "would generally result in their experiencing a genuine conversion."[9]

Charles G. Finney, a key figure of influence during the prelude period before Eby and Brenneman were excommunicated, was a professor of theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. Finney and his students advocated a form of prayer known as prevailing prayer. Prevailing prayer was defined as an "effectual, persevering prayer that sought a definite object and was intended to move God."[10]

Beulah Hostetler wrote that the Old Mennonites were offended by Finney's prevailing prayer. She explained the Mennonite perspective on prayer as,

> The believer with much propriety calls God his Father.. A loving Father can be trusted to supply the needs of His children without agonizing, prevailing prayer.[11]

Finney's influence was considerable throughout the Midwest since he traveled extensively, lecturing and holding revivals. It was most probable that the progenitors of the Missionary Church gained considerable insight and motivation through this zealous educator.

The Old Mennonites distrusted prayer meetings because many of their children had been lured away from their family churches to other denominations through this evangelical program. The prayer meetings of the mid-nineteenth century helped to promote evangelism and church growth for all the churches which employed its use. Mennonites were fearful of the assimilation process which had already taken its toll on their membership through social means. They assumed that prayer meetings were just one more way for the outside world to impose change on them. "Many of their young people, normally not baptized until in their twenties, were attending revival meetings held by other denominations and subsequently joining those churches."[12] It is unfortunate that the Old Mennonites waited so long before accepting the new ways. Perhaps much of the Old Mennonite membership would have remained with the denomination had the leadership seen the value of prayer meetings sooner.

For the Missionary Church and its founding churches, prayer meetings made important contributions. Probably the most significant was what transpired in Ontario's Port Elgin Church. Rev. Solomon Eby's conversion experience prompted him to institute weekly prayer meetings in his Old Mennonite

Church. In the spring of 1870, Eby began holding prayer meetings. Huffman recorded,

> "about New Year's of the next year, a great revival broke out, and almost all of the church members and a few outsiders accepted Christ anew and came into an experience where they realized a complete change of life."[13]

Prayer meetings became an meaningful part of the worship experience from that day on in the Port Elgin Church. Prayer meetings were to be adopted in the first conference resolutions drawn up for the future Missionary Church:

> Resolve, that prayer meetings and fellowship meetings are necessary means to sustain the members of the flock and to further them in their growth in grace.[14]

A second important contribution prayer meetings made to the Christians of that day was to provide a place where men, women, and children could give of their time and devotion to God. Until prayer meetings were introduced, most of the Mennonite Churches met only about once each month for services. Storms gave an account of the oldest Mennonite settlement in Waterloo County, Ontario. "Previous to the year 1890 services were held every four weeks... From 1842 to 1890 was a period of little change."[15]

With the practice of prayer meetings introduced by Solomon Eby and others in the Old Mennonite Church, came a new lifestyle to the Mennonite home selected for the meeting. Eileen Lageer wrote of the events surrounding Wednesday night prayer meetings. She described the hustle of the women as they prepared the home. Seating

arrangements, cleaning and polishing the old oil lamps, and dusting the house were just some of the many preparations. One could feel the anticipation those early members of our denomination felt as Wednesday drew near.

Whole families joined together at these weekly cottage prayer meetings. Lageer recorded a typical order of service for cottage prayer services:

> A song, the reading of scripture, a short exhortation and then the group knelt to pray. For upwards to 45 minutes they poured out their praise and petitions to God... For home, for the unsaved of the community, for missionaries, for the Lord's work, for the pastor, for the coming Sabbath services, they interceded... After prayer it was testimony time. Again they praised God for the victories and even for the struggles during the week. Sometimes these were accompanied by shouts of blessings... Another hymn, the benediction, and the meeting was over."[16]

After the prayer service finished, the members enjoyed fellowship together socially. Sometimes the members broke up into smaller groups to discuss theological questions. But more often, they just enjoyed talking to one another about their farms and everyday life. This fellowship was a major part of the nurturing process for new converts.

A third contribution that the prayer meeting made to the church was that it helped members to discover their spiritual needs. Daniel Hoch stated, "True Christianity, involves four steps: perception of sin, confession of the same, forgiveness after heartfelt prayer, and the reception of the Holy Spirit."[17] Many experienced a deep sense of

their spiritual need during the prayer meetings held on Wednesday nights.

Each of the founding churches of the Missionary Church were involved in prayer meetings early on. These leaders saw the benefit of laity and clergy on their knees before God. The young Missionary Church prospered because of its involvement with focused prayer where everyone shared the burdens of the whole church. They lifted one another before God in prayer on a regular basis.

The prayer meeting was a place where new converts learned how to grow in the faith. It brought life to many sick and dying congregations. Prayer meetings also encouraged people to pray. The Bible says it well:

> And my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."[18]

The founders of the Missionary Church knew from the beginning that the Church needed to awaken spiritually. Once this was accomplished the church became more evangelistic. Prayer meetings helped the church to realize that wonderful purpose.

Notes for Chapter Two

[1] Lewis O. Thompson, How to Conduct Prayer Meetings (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1880), 31-32.

[2] ibid., 47.

[3] J. Edwin Orr, The Second Evangelical Awakening (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1955), 279.

[4] Earle E. Cairns, Christianity Through The Centuries (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1954), 419.

[5] Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church (Newton: Raith and Life Press, 1975), 35.

[6] Orr, op. cit., 263.

[7] Robert Friedmann, Mennonite Piety Through The Centuries (Goshen: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), 249.

[8] Beulah S. Hostetler, American Mennonites and Protestant Movements (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1987), 168.

[9] Storms, op. cit., 38.

[10] Hostetler, op. cit., 169

[11] ibid., 171.

[12] ibid., 167.

[13] Huffman, op. cit., 42.

[14] ibid., 54.

[15] Storms, op. cit., 30-31.

[16] Lageer, op. cit., 78.

[17] Pannabecker, op. cit., 36.

[18] II Chronicles 7:14

Chapter Three

The Influence of Sunday Schools on the Church

The Sunday School movement was another vehicle which influenced the founders of the Missionary Church. Some of the Missionary Church fathers were more involved in the Sunday School than others. These church leaders were wise since the Sunday School played a significant role in improving the lives of many people during the mid-nineteenth century.

The Sunday school was originally the idea of an Englander, Robert Raikes in 1780. Raikes wanted "to give children religious training and elementary instruction in reading, writing, and simple arithmetic ..."[1] His idea was to later be adopted by the established church both in England and America.

"The American Sunday school movement, which was formally organized in 1824 as the American Sunday School Union, went hand in hand with both home mission and educational concerns."[2] The movement became very popular in many of the mainline denominations. Sunday schools offered lay persons opportunities to minister in an important work. Clarence Benson wrote concerning the American Sunday School Union,

> They sought men qualified to introduce better principles and methods of instruction, with sufficient magnetism and force of address to inspire a deeper and wider interest in the cause at the very centers of population.[3]

This movement swept quickly across the United States for good reason. Sunday schools were greatly needed during the nineteenth century because so many children were forced to work in factories in order to help their families to survive.[4] Only the children of the rich could afford to get an education prior to the introduction of Sunday schools.

The Sunday school movement gained momentum partially from the prayer meeting movement mentioned in the preceding chapter. Edwin Rice exposed this in his historical account of the Sunday school movement:

> The great revival of 1857-59 gave a new impetus to the development of the Sunday-school. It aroused fresh enthusiasm in the systematic study of scriptures through infant, juvenile, adult, and Bible classes and teacher's meetings.[5]

During its early development in America, the Sunday school was loosely organized with little interaction between the various teaching points. With time, the teachers began to sense a need for discourse between one another. They longed to compare experiences with each other. A convention system was developed to make this possible. Anne Boylan gave a description of the convention system.

> This system of local, state and national conventions fostered a new type of interdenominational cooperation by ignoring doctrinal issues and bringing workers together on the basis of a common interest in teaching.[6]

Sunday schools were destined to expand across the country. Many of the teachers in the early days of Sunday

school became home missionaries by traveling at their own expense to teach Sunday school in the remote towns and settlements throughout the Western Frontier.

The American Sunday School Union adopted its Valley Resolution in May, 1830, which Hartman described as

> The famous Valley Resolution of the American Sunday School Union, envisioned as it did the propagation of Sabbath schools in every destitute place in the West, deserves the landmark position it has been accorded in Sunday school history.[7]

This resolution was significant in that it stirred several people to begin organizing Sunday schools in the State of Indiana. From those early pioneers in the Sunday school movement came the vision of how important Sunday school was to the average citizen. Their efforts were to later touch several young ministers in the Old Mennonite Church and, in turn, would alter the course of Mennonite history.

The Old Mennonite community was opposed to the Sunday school for the most part. There were several reasons for their opposition. The most obvious of these reasons was the fear Mennonites had concerning change. Mennonites had good reason to fear change. Throughout their history, Mennonites had been forced to confront changes on two continents. Most Mennonites had migrated to the United States and Canada to avoid changes imposed on them in their home countries in Central Europe. In these countries, they had encountered severe persecution for their convictions. Many Mennonites were resolved to avoid change at any cost.

Before adopting their new name, Mennonites were known as Anabaptists. Many Anabaptist believers were martyred in the most gruesome ways because of their firm commitment to their convictions. Often when a new ruling class came into power the Mennonites beliefs were again be put to the test. Their non-resistant stance prevented them from defending themselves against the tyranny of those who took advantage of them. Migration to the North American continent was an effort to follow their convictions as they felt led and in some cases "the only alternative to martyrdom."[8]

Thus, change was no friend to the Mennonite Church. It had always been the enemy! With this in mind, many of the Old Mennonite believers felt that Sunday school was a threat to their whole way of believing.

> John J. Funk, one of the leaders in the development of Sunday Schools among the Mennonites, declared, "Sunday schools in the early days of my life were not only considered needless to the development of the Christian life and church prosperity but were looked upon as an innovation that was absolutely detrimental to the promotion of a humble, devoted Christian life and the advancement of religious devotion; and above all that it was an open door to lead children and young people into worldliness, vanity and pride.[9]

This attitude, held by many Mennonites, was contemporary with Daniel Brenneman's time also. In fact, Brenneman and Funk held special meetings together throughout much of the Midwest. Both men saw the value of introducing the Sunday school movement to their beloved Mennonite Church.

Other key promoters of the Sunday school movement in the Old Mennonite Church were Solomon Eby and Simon S. Gerig. Gerig was the first Association Sunday School Superintendent, elected in 1915 for the Missionary Church Association.[10] Both Eby and Gerig broke ground for the first Sunday school work introduced to the Mennonites.

Another great figure in the Sunday school movement was a traveling missionary named Eusebius Hersey. Hersey, an elder in the Evangelical Mennonite Church, was recorded as being the first missionary for the Missionary Church. He was "among the early pioneers of the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ."[11] His tireless efforts to propogate the gospel wherever possible were inspirational to all those observing him. Storms wrote about the evangelist, Hersey,

> The pioneer open-air preacher of the Church, he often conducted meetings on the street or in the Town Square, sometimes speaking to large crowds of one thousand or more. He made thirteen trips to Canada and one to the American West. Speaking fluently in both English and German, for years he preached almost every night, with Sunday often meaning three church services and two Sunday schools.[12]

Sunday school was an integral part in the history of the Missionary Church. Sunday school helped to shape the church during its earliest beginnings. Everek Storms proposed that Sunday school had as much part in the formation of the Missionary Church as any other cause.

"It was this adverseness to Sunday schools, together with the opposition of the Old Church to prayer meetings, evangelistic services, and other aggressive work, that resulted in some of the prominent men being excommunicated."[13]

When the break was made and the new denomination was formed, the Sunday school became a key emphasis for the newly organized church. At the Union Conference of 1875, the following resolution was passed: "That Sunday schools shall be organized and supported by all our power."[14]

The oldest Sunday school in the Missionary Church was near Markham, Ontario at the Dickson Hill church. This Sunday school was organized sometime in the 1860's.[15]

Sunday schools have undergone many developmental changes over the past century with the introduction of Sunday school conventions, departmentalization, Daily Vacation Bible schools and cirriculum. These improvements have helped the Sunday school to be an integral part of the Missionary Church.

The first innovation for the Missionary Church Sunday school program was the Sunday school convention. In the December, 1878 issue of the Gospel Banner, a writer calling himself Jacobus wrote:

> Would it not be a good thing if the church would hold a Sabbath school teachers, at some convenient point, in order to bring about greater interest on the part of teachers and the friends of the Sabbath school cause, that beginners might become better acquainted with the work, and be enabled to labor more successfully in this direction.[16]

Jacobus' call for the church to have a denominational Sunday school convention started the Sabbath school teachers throughout the various districts preparing for one.

In 1888 the General Conference recommended that the districts begin holding Sunday school conventions. On November 6-7, 1889, the first convention was held in Breslau, Ontario.[17] Eighteen Sunday school delegates gave reports from their respective schools. Officers were elected and the convention was organized for the Ontario District.

Sunday School Conventions:

Date	District	City
Nov. 1889	Ontario	Breslau
1898	Indiana	Wakarusa
1900	Ohio	Potsdam
1901	Nebraska	
1905	Alberta	Didsbury
1917	Michigan	Brown City[18]

The second developmental change came in the form of organization. Departmentalization was the practice of dividing up the different age groups. This helped the Sunday school leaders adapt the program to meet the needs of the students better. Departmentalization was first introduced in the 1920's in Indiana after the leaders of the Indiana Sunday school movement did a major study on existing Sunday schools. Hartman reported their study's findings.

> The analysis of organization and administration revealed that, by and large, Indiana's churches had not assumed responsibility for the organizing,

> administering and planning of their church schools... The typical school had classes only- no departments, 94.7% of the rural schools being so organized, 49.3% of those in urban areas.[19]

Departmentalization was introduced to The Missionary Church in Elkhart, Indiana at the Zion United Missionary Church in 1931.[20] This was at first viewed with suspicion by many in the Missionary Church because it was a major change from the past customs.[21] In the final analysis, departmentalization helped the Sunday school to minister more effectively to the needs of all age groups in the church. Since then the practice has been adopted by all of the Sunday schools in the denomination.

A third development in the Sunday school movement of the Missionary Church was Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS). DVBS was a by-product of the Sunday school movement which was first held in a Missionary Church in 1928 at the Chapel Hill Church near Union, Michigan. DVBS was an attempt to utilize the summer vacation for religious education. This idea was first proposed by Dr. Edward R. Bartlett of Minneapolis in 1920.[22]

The Missionary Church's development of Sunday school cirriculum was another factor which heavily influenced the total Christian education program of the church and it's development. Hartman in his evaluation of the Sunday school movement in Indiana pointed to the problems encountered in the Sunday school curriculum. He claimed that the lessons were "antiquated and unsound educationally...and did not recognize age differentials or the particular needs of

persons at various stages of development."[23] By 1922, the graded lesson and series of materials were introduced by the Internation Council of Religious Education. Graded curriculum helped teachers to present their lessons at the same understanding level as their students.

One problem that developed in the Missionary Church with regard to Sunday School curriculum was reported by historian Everek Storms. During the early part of the union with the Evangelical Mennonites, it appeared that the Church as a denomination was in agreement. Little by little this unity eroded with many different causes mentioned. One cause identified by Storms needed closer examination. The underlying cause seemed to be a swing away from the holiness theological persuasion held by the majority of the denomnation. Storms cited that prior to their secession from the denomination, the Pennsylvania District began using Sunday school supplies printed by Union Gospel Press. "Some of its writers were definitely Calvinistic."[24] Although there was no way of pinpointing curriculum as the major factor of the split, it gave a subtle nudge to the membership. The change of view was very gradual, but effective.

The Sunday school program in the Missionary Church was used by many districts to plant new churches. Sunday school has exceeded the attendance of the church in membership figures since it began in the Missionary Church. It has remained a necessary ministry arm of the church.

Notes For Chapter Three

[1] Cairns, op. cit., 398.

[2] Hostetler, op. cit., 178.

[3] Clarence Benson, A Popular History of Christian Education (Chicago: Moody Press, 1943), 154.

[4] Hostetler, op. cit., 178.

[5] Edwin W. Rice, The Sunday School Movement and the Sunday School Union (Philadephia: American Sunday School Union, 1917), 165.

[6] Anne M. Boylan, Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution 1790-1880 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 87.

[7] Grover Hartman, A School For God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana (Indianapolis: Central Publishing Co., 1980), 5.

[8] Dennis D. Engbrecht, "The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1990), 12.

[9] Hartman, op. cit., 14.

[10] Gerig and Lugibihl, op. cit., 114.

[11] C.H. Brunner, "Eusebius Hersey," Gospel Banner, 7 Sept. 1944, 6.

[12] Storms, op. cit., 61.

[13] Storms, op. cit., 181.

[14] Huffman, op. cit., 54.

[15] ibid., 182.

[16] "Extracts From Letters" Gospel Banner, Dec. 1878, 5.

[17] Storms, op. cit., 182.

[18] Ibid., 182-183.

[19] Hartman, op. cit., 76-77.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Hartman, op. cit., 85.

[23] Ibid., 73.

[24] Storms, op. cit., 74.

Chapter Four

The Influence of Revivals on the Church

Revivalism in the nineteenth century touched every denomination on the North American Continent. The Old Mennonite Church was no exception to this. Dennis Engbrecht summarized, "No other religious phenomena had a greater impact on the Mennonite experience than American revivalism."[1]

Revivalism has been defined simply as "seasons of remarkable religious interest, in which the public mind has been turned to spiritual subjects."[2] A more comprehensive definition of revival was given by George Thomas,

> Revivalists varied in their orthodoxy, but the common thread was that they defined the individual as the unit that approaches God and chooses to be saved or not. A central belief was that an emotional, life-changing experience marked salvation, and one maintained religiosity and salvation through continued experiences, inward piety, and right moral behavior. Therefore, while the individual's relation to God was a unique one, it had to conform to the definitions of a true salvation experience and a subsequent moral lifestyle.[3]

Revivals were often called protracted meetings. This name originated in the Methodist Church and referred to meetings which ran from evening to evening or from day to day.[4] Timothy Smith recorded the following about revivals:

> Long promotion of camp meetings had stamped Wesleyanism with a fervor which city churches expressed in yearly seasons of special religious interest called protracted meetings. Here sinners were bidden each night to the "anxious seat," or mourner's bench, devised about 1808 in a crowded

> New York City chapel to enable saints to deal with seekers more conveniently.[5]

Revivalism was not new in the nineteenth century. History had recorded several great revivals.

> Among the great revivals in the Christian Church may be listed the Cluniac Reform in the 10th century; the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century; the Pietist movement in the 17th and 18th centuries; the Evangelical Revival in the 18th century; and the First and Second Great Awakenings in 18th- and 19th- century America.[6]

Six American revivals helped form much of the religious character on the American continent. These included: 1) the Great Awakening of the early eighteenth century; 2) the second Great Awakening (1793-1810); 3) the Charles G. Finney revival (1824-1827); 4) the 1853 revival; 5) the 1857-1859 revival; and 6) the D. L. Moody revival (1879-1890).[7]

The first Great Awakening has been referred to as "the more Calvinistic Great Awakening" and "... the American counterpart of Pietism in Europe and the Methodist revival in England."[8] The Second Great Awakening was more an answer to the folly of deism and the decadence it promoted. The Second Great Awakening helped to shape America during its formative years as a nation. Many church members examined the spiritual vitality in their own churches. This Second Great Awakening influenced the early church fathers of the Missionary Church. As its revivals swept across the Alleghany Mountains into the Midwest, they also crossed the 49th parallel into Canada.

The Old Mennonite Church members had kept themselves segregated from the major influence of the revival movement as Edward Yoder, an Old Mennonite historian indicated,

> In some settlements west of the Alleghany Mountains the spiritual state of the congregation was not very vigorous. The young people of Mennonite homes were not gathering into the congregations, and those who did so joined the body only after they were married and settled down in life.[9]

Conditions in the Old Mennonite Church were certainly ripe for a spiritual awakening.

Several in the Old Mennonite Church wanted to bring reforms into the church. Frank Epp described the common complaints of these members, "...the church was too rigid and sterile, too formal in its worship, too reserved in its religious expression, and sufficiently explicit in preaching the new birth."[10]

Revivalism intersected with the Mennonites from several sources: their Anabaptist history, pietistic movements back in their homelands, Methodist efforts to assimilate and evangelize, and in some a sense that it was time for renewal in the Church.

One source where revivalism influenced the Mennonites came from their own history. Anabaptists (later known as Mennonites) were a product of the Reformation in Switzerland. Their leaders Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz had been disciples of Zwingli. After a while Grebel and Mantz felt that Zwingli was not returning enough to the New Testament Church model. Because of this they organized the

first official Anabaptist congregation at Zurich, Switzerland.[11]

The members of the Anabaptist movement took their beliefs very seriously. When Zwingli tried to force them to leave their convictions and return to the State Church which he had founded, they refused even when threatened with death. Many became martyrs because they chose to use the New Testament as their guide rather than the state-owned Reformed Church. As the persecution increased across the region so did the Anabaptist movement. Many more people joined the church even though they knew they could become martyrs if discovered. Thousands of Anabaptists were brutally murdered for their faith at the hand of Catholics and Protestants.

This Anabaptist revival produced a spiritual renewal throughout Central Europe from the middle to late sixteenth century. Storms reported the Anabaptist's contribution,

> To their credit it must also be said that they were the best living people of their day ... (they) stressed that right doctrine was not enough: a man must renounce his sins and live a pure life consistent with his testimony as a Christian.[12]

Another intersection where revivalism crossed paths with the Mennonites came from their homelands in Central Europe. Pietism revivals were becoming common place in Germany and its surrounding region. This pietistic movement gave a foundation for later revival works to build on. Dennis Engbrecht described its emphasis, "Eighteenth century European pietism empasized an emotional, "heartfelt"

religion resulting in good works and various forms of nonconformity."

A third intersection with revivals for the Mennonites came through contact with the Methodists. During the nineteenth century the Methodists were heavily involved in the revival movement. Cornelius Dyck wrote about the Methodist connection with the founders of the Missionary Church:

> Much of the impetus for the new spiritual vigor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church came from contacts with Wesleyan piety and church organization, together with an emphasis upon holiness prevalent among some Methodist churches.[13]

Methodists wanted to spread the good news to all branches of the Church Universal. That message was primarily the holiness message. Along with holiness, they wanted to draw all churches into a more eccumenical association. This was not a bad idea, but considering the Mennonite's history, it may have been the wrong time to make any moves in that direction.

One of the side effects from this Methodist push came from their zeal to help assimilate the German people. Timothy Smith recorded,

> By 1860, for example, 229 of the 289 domestic missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church worked among the German population, and thirty others among Scandinavians. The home missionary crusade leaders considered themselves as much civilizing and Americanizing agents as soul winners.[14]

Revivalism intersected the Old Mennonite Church when several ministers began to experience its renewal first-

hand. Solomon Eby was one such minister. He had pastored for thirteen years in the Old Mennonite Church before coming to a personal conversion experience himself. Eileen Lageer attributed Eby's conversion to revival fires and personal study of the Word where she said "he had the unhappy experience of preaching himself under conviction."[15] Eby was converted in 1869.

Eby's conversion prompted him to get his Port Elgin, Ontario Church involved in a weekly prayer meeting. This was a new concept for the members of the Old Mennonite Church. Prayer meetings were forbidden by denominational leadership. In less than a year, the church began to experience a spiritual revival. Most of the members and several non-member townspeople felt convicted of the sin in their lives because of the revival. The church began to grow numerically as a result of this renewal.

"Old customs were disregarded, and anything that would promote spiritual life adopted. Religious life was simply revolutionized."[16] The leadership misunderstood why the church was withdrawing from several of the old customs. The fear was that these Mennonites were going "Methodist."[17]

Actually, Solomon Eby wanted to incorporate revivals into the existing church to bring renewal. "Initially, they incorporated revivalism while maintaining the major tenets of Anabaptism."[18]

Daniel Wismer, a fellow pastor in neighboring Waterloo County, Ontario, had a similar conversion experience as Eby.

Wismer was reluctant to get involved in the more progressive services because he feared the results of taking that action. While he hesitated, he became very ill. At the point where all hope was lost for his recovery, he promised the Lord that he would "preach and take up the work he knew he should, if only the Lord would heal him."[19] Wismer was soon well and yet he hesitated to get involved in what he promised God. Again he became ill, but this time he promised to not fail the Lord if he was again healed. As soon as he was better, Wismer began preaching revival messages and soon a revival broke out in his church. This type of phenomenon was happening in several congregations of the Old Mennonites.

In 1872, Daniel Brenneman and John F. Funk held the first revival services in the Mennonite Church at Masontown in western Pennsylvania.[20] Brenneman continued to promote the revival movement while Funk placed more of his efforts into the less controversial promotion of the Sunday School.

The year after holding this revival at Masontown, Brenneman and John Krupp, a fellow minister went to investigate the revival in Solomon Eby's church. Both men were impressed with what they saw in Eby's Port Elgin revival.

Upon their return, they were both interrogated by their fellow ministers. Krupp was less guarded about his impressions toward the revival movement. Brenneman knew

that suspicion would be the ministers' first reaction and so he spoke more reservedly to them about what he saw.

About a year later, Brenneman returned again to Port Elgin, Ontario. He wanted to investigate again whether the revival had continued or not. "On his return he was fully decided what stand to take on the question."[21]

When he returned from Eby's Church, Brenneman discovered that his friend, John Krupp had been excommunicated. Within a short time, Brenneman was also excommunicated. Both men had simply introduced a revivalistic program to their church before the church was ready to accept it.

Another church father who was a promoter of revivalism in the Mennonite and Amish community was Joseph Ramseyer. He had come to know the Lord in 1885 on his grandfather's farm near Zurich, Ontario, Canada, while plowing. After moving with his family to a farm near Elkton, Michigan, he had another spiritual experience. This experience has since been called the famous "willow bush experience." By his own description he received the Holy Spirit in a new way. "For three days I had given myself to prayer, and while kneeling in the willow bush, the Holy Spirit came in to abide."[22]

Ramseyer arose from this experience with a burning conviction to share the gospel with his English-speaking neighbors. He started holding Sunday mornings services, mid-week prayer meetings, and cottage prayer meetings. "Revival broke out in the Huron Peninsula and nearly every home in

that section of the country was touched and helped by the scope of its influence."[23]

In 1893, Ramseyer began to do traveling evangelistic work. He held revivals throughout the Midwest States. There were tremendous outpourings of the Holy Spirit reported in each service. These services were described by Lugibihl and Gerig,

> There was always the preaching of the sterner truths of the Gospel including sin, judgment, and hell. These messages were accompanied by an additional emphasis upon the much newer truths of the "deeper life" or sanctification, divine healing, and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.[24]

Often the Holy Spirit was so felt by all that they either dealt with their spiritual needs immediately or later that very evening. Ramseyer was mightily used by God in preaching the revival message to those Mennonites who were hungering for the "deeper life."

The atmosphere of revival has been preserved for the inward spiritual growth of the Missionary Church. Many Missionary Churches have started to introduce new methods to bring about the same results. These will be discussed in the next chapter. Perhaps the greatest statement describing the influence revivals had on the Missionary Church and its founders was shared by a Mennonite Historian, Cornelius Dyck, "The spirit of the Missionary Church might be described as the search for a religion of the heart, for a faith that makes a difference in all of life."[25] May this always be our quest!

Notes For Chapter Four

[1] Engbrecht, op. cit., 190.

[2] Matthew Simpson, Cyclopedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1880), 752.

[3] George M. Thomas, Revivalism and Cultural Change (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 67.

[4] Ibid., 737.

[5] Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 46-47.

[6] Richard S. Taylor, ed. Beacon Dictionary of Theology (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1983), 458.

[7] Engbrecht, op. cit., 191.

[8] Cairns, op. cit., 368-369.

[9] Edward Yoder, Mennonites and their Heritage, No III (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee, 1942), 57.

[10] Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 149.

[11] Storms, op. cit., 14.

[12] Ibid., 17.

[13] Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1967), 308.

[14] Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism & Social Reform (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 39.

[15] Lageer, op. cit., 18.

[16] Huffman, op. cit, 42.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Engbrecht, op. cit., 192.

[19] Huffman, op. cit., 43.

[20] Hostetler, op. cit., 167.

[21] Huffman, op. cit., 48.

[22] Lugibihl & Gerig, op. cit., 23.

[23] ibid.

[24] ibid., 24.

[25] Dyck, op. cit., 308.

Chapter Five

Current relevance of prayer meetings, Sunday school, and revivals

It was impossible to research the history of the Missionary Church without wondering about its current direction. Questions kept coming up about the importance of each of the influences that were so popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Did these influences remain intact or have they taken on new variations?

The only way to measure the effectiveness and relevancy of these influences on the Missionary Church was to take a survey of a cross-section of the present-day churches. A survey was sent on February 5, 1992 to fifty-two pastor within the districts in the continental United States. No surveys were sent to Canada or to Hawaii in an effort to gain an accurate picture of the U.S. church's perspective. Of the 52 there were 41 returned by March 20, 1992. According to sources familiar with survey taking, this was an extraordinary response.

The questions were focused on each of the three influences. There were also some demographic questions to determine the size of the congregation and some geographic questions to determine regional preferences, if any. The results were most helpful in formulating opinions of where the Missionary Church may be heading.

Prayer meetings in the traditional sense are still in use in most of the Missionary Churches. Though most churches report decreases in attendence in the traditional midweek service, (see chart A) they are reporting an increase in prayer involvement in other prayer programs sponsored by the church (see chart B).

Some of the organized prayer activities submitted by the pastors were: a) prayer chains; b) cell groups; c) prayer breakfasts; d) special times of prayer; and e) preservice prayer times (see chart C). These alternative prayer activities were described as more appealing to the membership and thus had attracted more participation.

The traditional Sunday school program questions drew the most response from those being surveyed. It was discovered that many of the pastors were currently doing research into the Sunday school programs in their individual churches.

The pastors who reported increases in Sunday School attendance (43.9%) exactly matched the number of those reporting decreases (43.9%) over the past ten years. While 12.2% reported that their Sunday school program had neither grown nor decreased in the same period of time (see chart D).

The general opinion expressed in the survey seemed to indicate that the Missionary Church is on the threshold of major changes in the Sunday school program. This opinion came from every district within the continental United

States and from every size of congregation. Those under fifty members to those over 500 and everything in between were surveyed (see chart E).

The survey asked about other Christian Education programs used by the churches surveyed. The top six programs submitted by the pastor's survey were: a) kid's clubs (Cadets, etc.); b) youth programs; c) small groups; d) elective classes (midweek or Sunday evenings); e) seminars; and f) vacation Bible school (see chart F).

When asked what the future effectiveness and value of the traditional Sunday school would be, five definite responses were given. Some gave two suggustions so the results are not explicit representations. The two most common responses were: 1) that Sunday school needed to make changes to adapt more closely with today's congregation; and 2) if changes are not made, the traditional Sunday schools will require much more work in the future. One-fourth of the pastors responding said that Sunday schools are fine just as they are. One-tenth of the pastors surveyed said it was time to scrap the Sunday school program altogether. And one pastor answered that he knew there was a problem but he didn't have the solution (see chart G).

Revivals were another influence in the history of the Missionary Church which were extremely important to the founders of the denomination. From the results of the survey nearly two-thirds of the Missionary Churches responding no longer schedule revival services at all. One-

third of the churches are still holding 1-2 revivals each year (see chart H).

In this question, geographic regions played a more significant role. The churches most likely to have revivals were either rural or Midwestern churches. The urban centers and non-agrarian States were less likely to participate in revivals.

Most pastors reported that revival services were more for internal growth than for evangelistic outreach. Other programs were listed by the pastors surveyed which promoted their evangelistic outreach. These programs were: a) One-on-one evangelism and closely related friendship evangelism; b) neighborhood work to build relationships in the neighborhood; c) calling program (clergy and laity); d) home Bible studies taken to the unsaved person's home or in small cell groups; e) youth ministries where youth help to win others; and f) evangelism and outreach training (see chart I).

The conclusions drawn from this study were both positive and negative. On the positive side, The Missionary Church has a great history for which it can be proud. Solomon Eby, Daniel Brenneman, Joseph Ramseyer, and William Gehman probably would have enjoyed the good fellowship and spiritual atmosphere found in today's Missionary Church.

On the negative side, change seems to be on the horizon. Historically, the Missionary Church has suffered when change has been introduced. How will the church

respond to changes in the Sunday school program. Of even greater concern will be the theological stance of the denomination in the future. Many denominations are opting for a softer Gospel with undercurrents of Calvinism. How will the Missionary Church face this subtle enemy.

To date, the Missionary Church has risen to every occasion and stood firm against its opposers. There has been no decisions made which would cause us to cast doubt on the church's future. May the Missionary Church spend every available moment, until Christ returns, preparing the way for many to join in that heavenly throng.

Chart A

Holds Traditional Prayer Mtgs

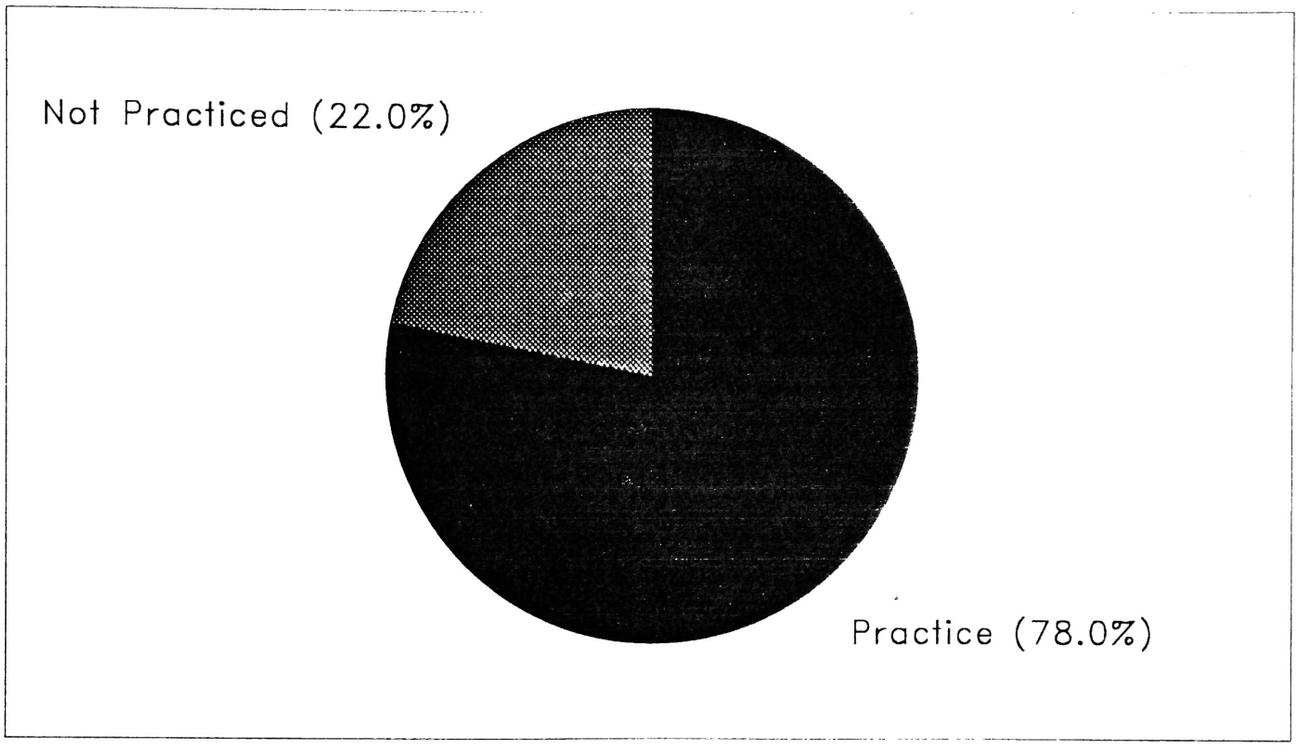


Chart B

Increase/Decrease Organized Prayer

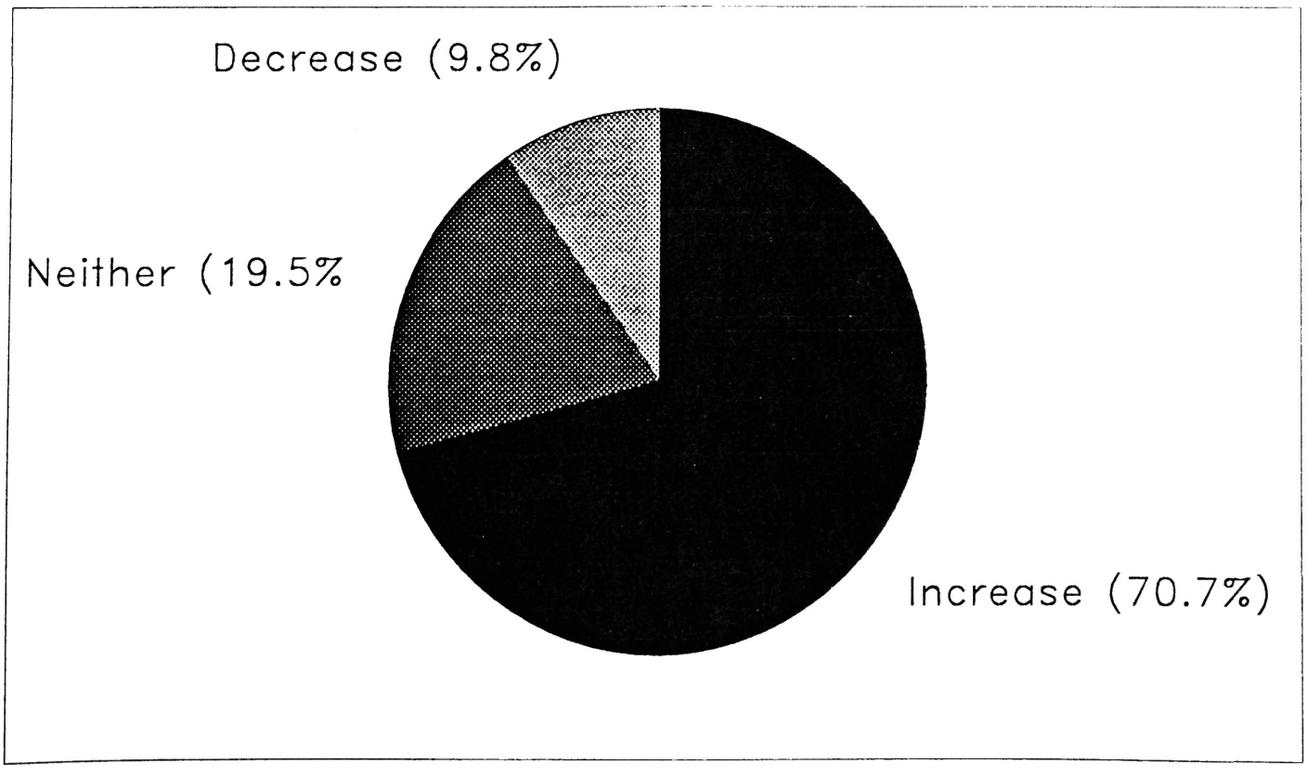


Chart C

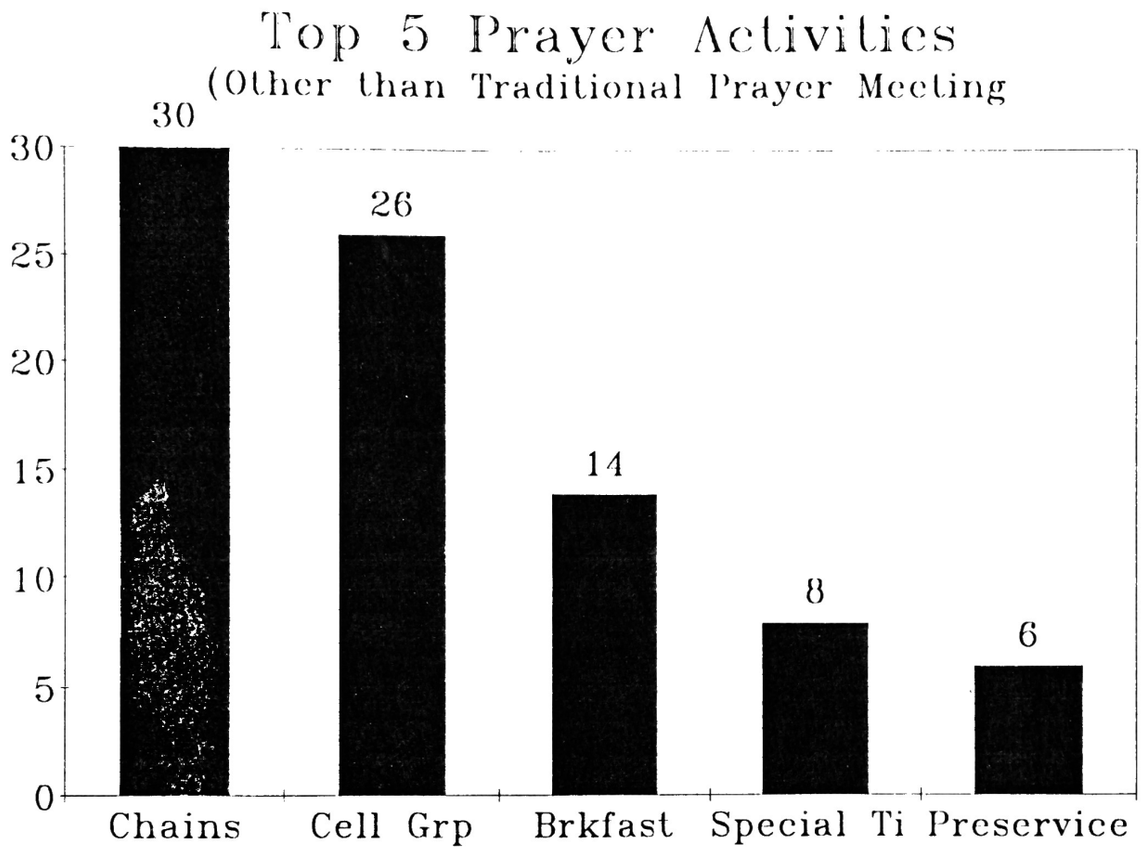


Chart D

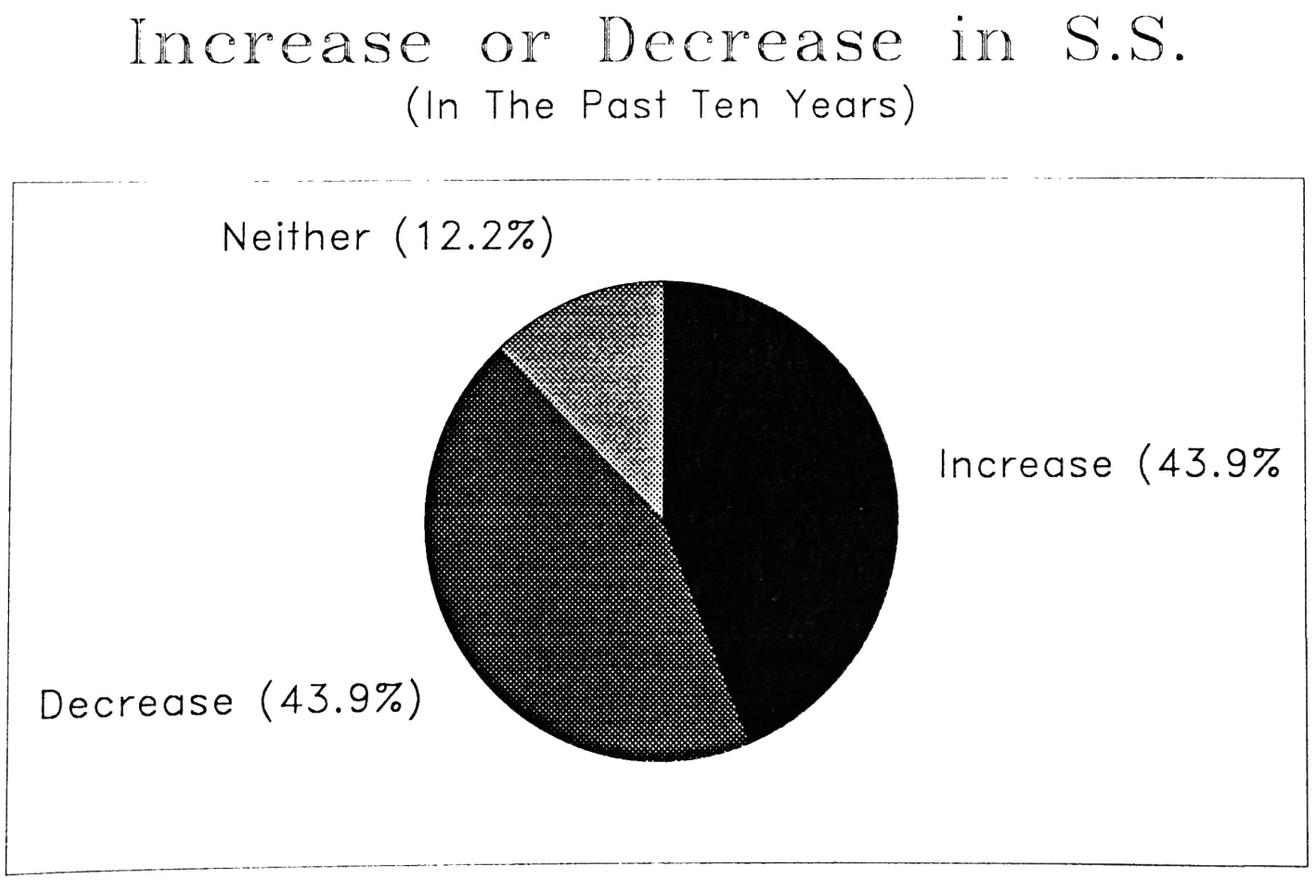


Chart E

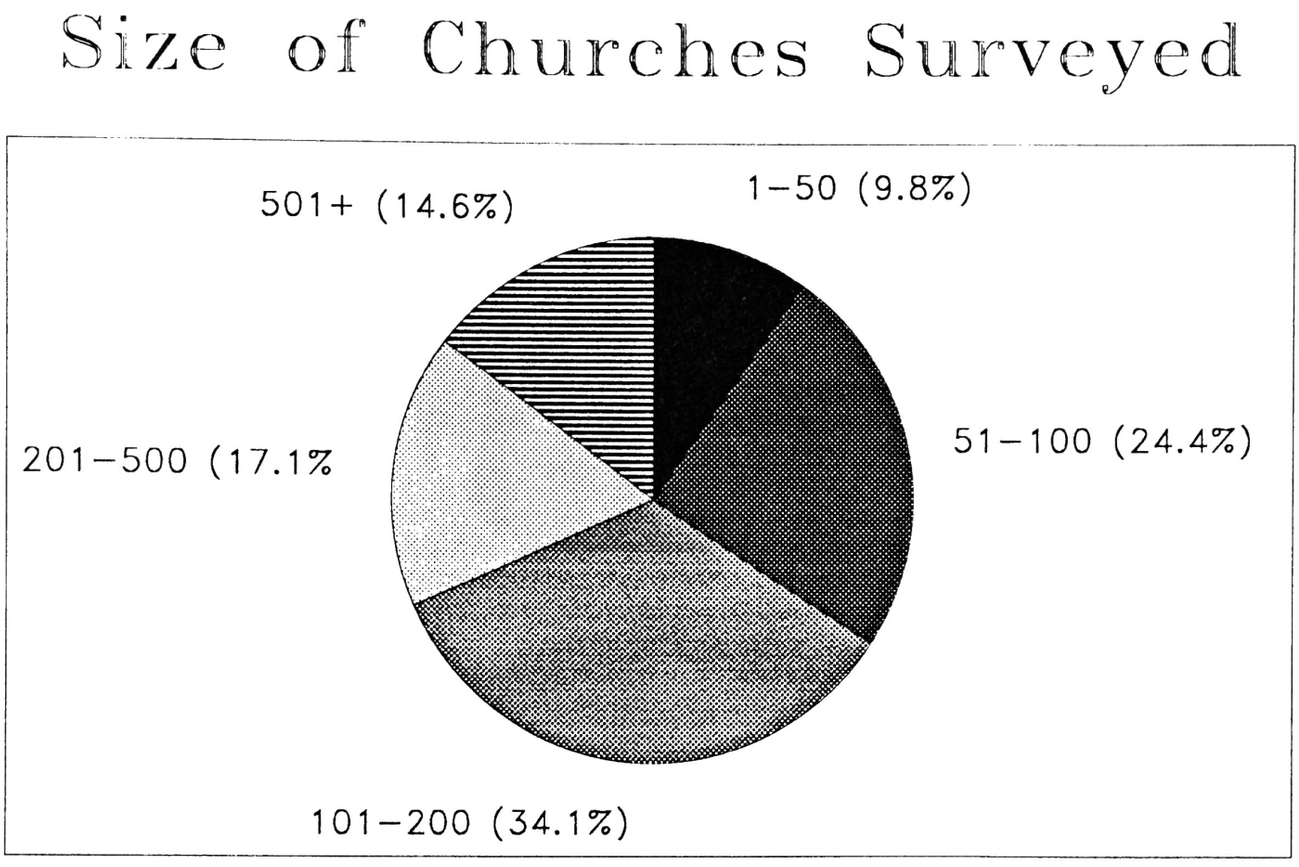


Chart F

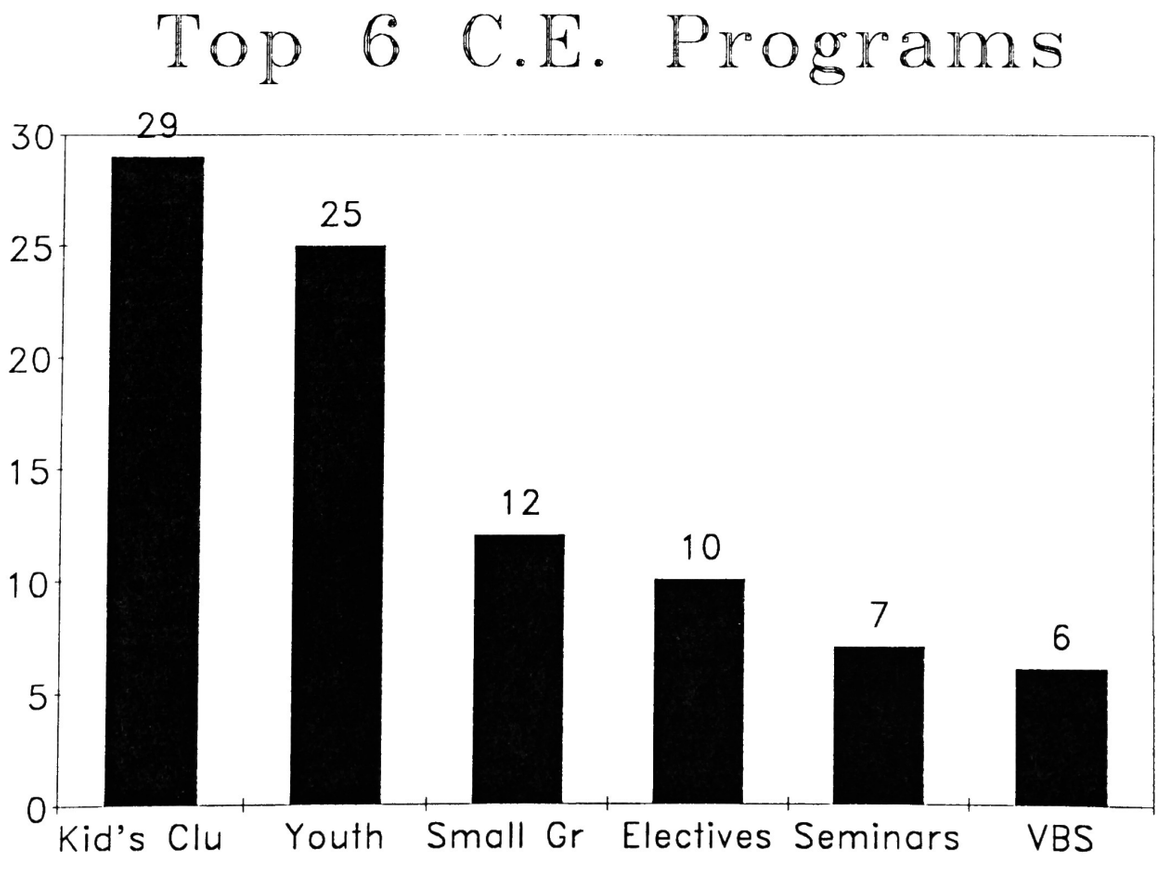


Chart G

Recommendations for S.S.

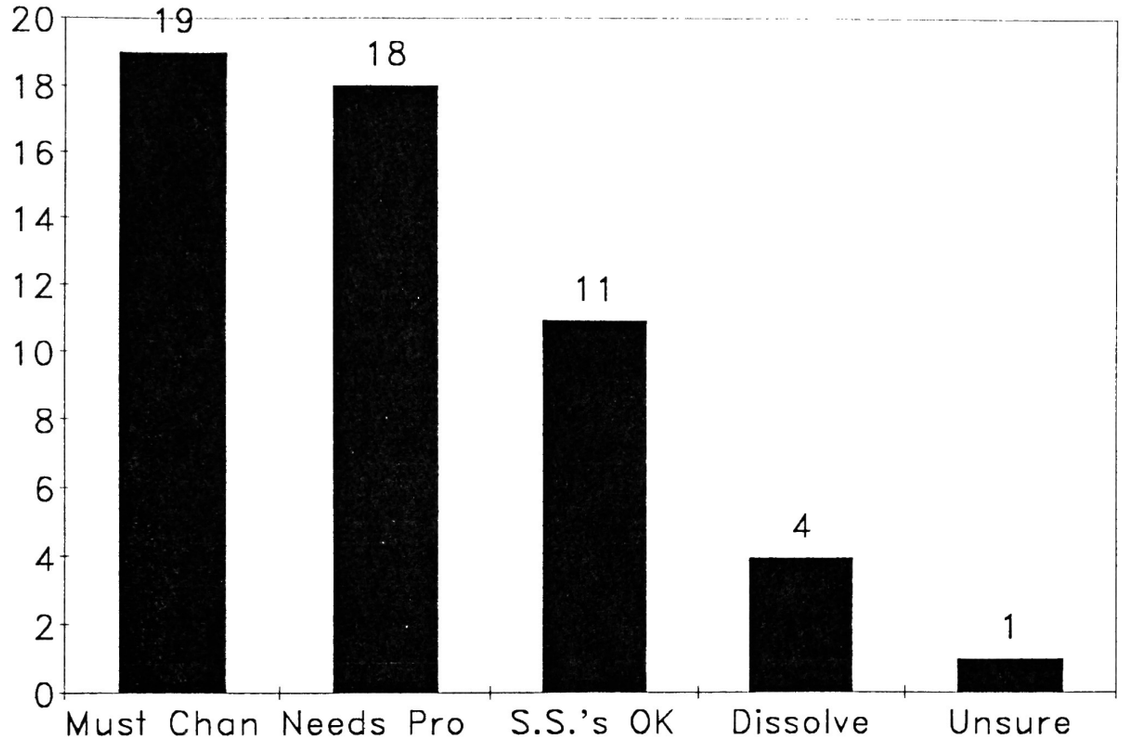


Chart H

Churches Using Revivals

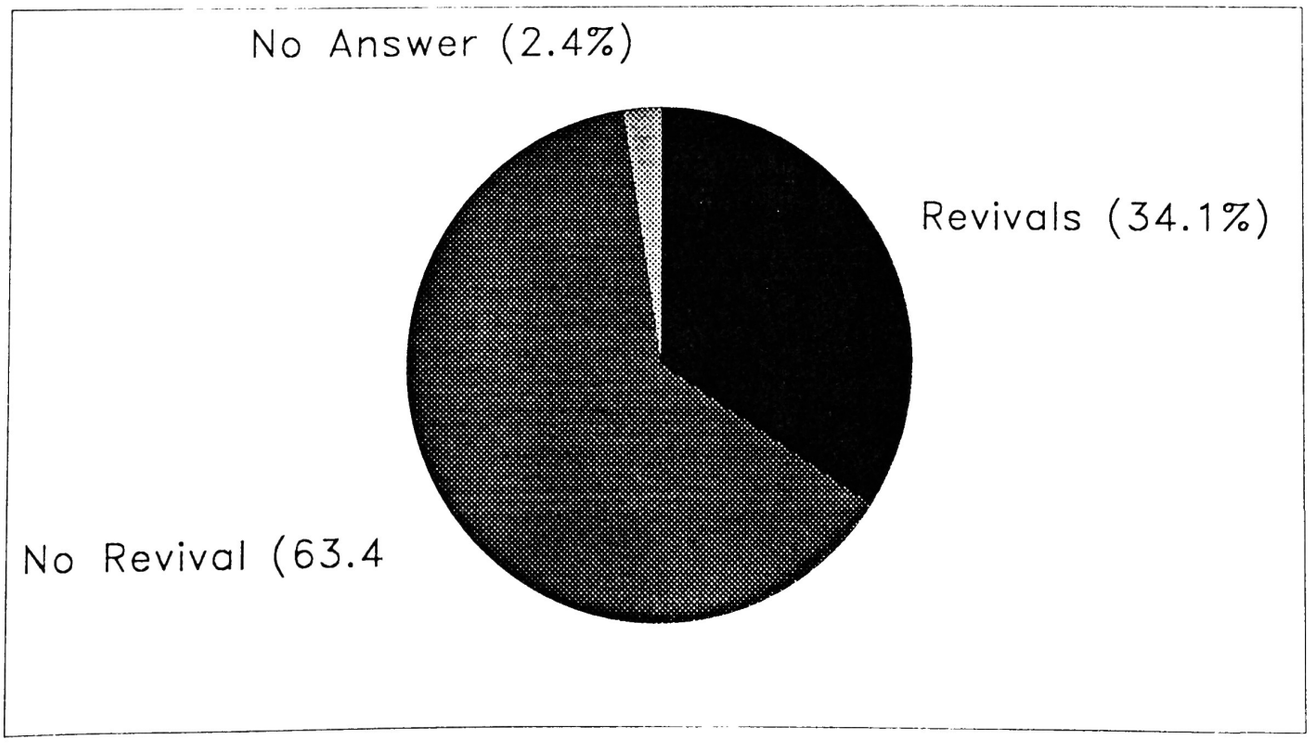
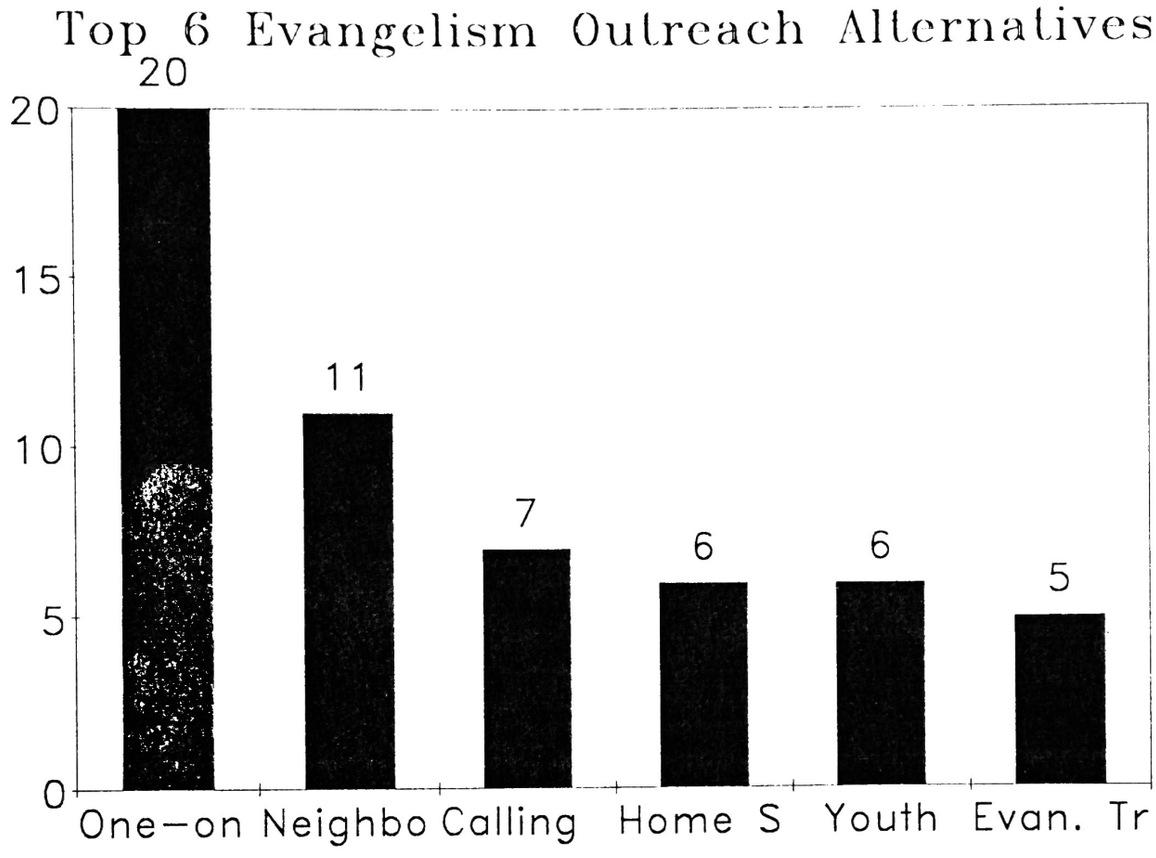


Chart I


Top 6 Evangelism Outreach Alternatives
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Huffman, Jasper Abraham Collection.

Storms, Everek Richard Collection.

Habegger, Tillman. "History of the Missionary Church Association." Tillman Habeggar teaching outline for a church history course at Fort Wayne Bible College, 1963. Original housed in Archives of Missionary Church, Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN.

Note: The following holdings were given to me by Wayne Brenneman, great-grandson to Daniel Brenneman:

Brenneman, Daniel. Thoughts In Rhyme. Goshen: Daniel Brenneman, 1911.

Brenneman, Wayne. "The Birth Of A Church." MS. Skits of the life of Elder Daniel Brenneman, N.d.

Forrest, Vera. Our Exciting Heritage. Colborne: Canada East District of the Missionary Church, N.d.

North Central Distict of the Missionary Church. 100 Years of Spiritual Growth. Elkhart: Bethel Publishing, 1980.

Note: the following item was obtained from the Asbury Special Collections Dept., housed in the seminary library lower level:

Brenneman, Daniel. Letter to C. Henry Smith. Photocopy. 1918. Original letter is housed at Bluffton College Mennonite Historical Library.